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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 002758

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN TO CHAVEZ ON MURDER OF CUBANS: "WHAT  
ABOUT US?"

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) The September 2 murder of Cuban doctor Raquel de los Angeles Perez Ramirez in a Caracas barrio struck a raw nerve with President Chavez. With his administration currently criticized for not being tough on crime, the murder of a Cuban doctor somehow provoked a reaction in Chavez that the exceedingly high numbers of murdered Venezuelans has not been able to do. With Fidel Castro's fragile health and Chavez positioning himself to take over Castro's role as reigning revolutionary in the Western Hemisphere, Chavez's public plea for heightened security for Cuban doctors may be more of a gesture to the ailing Castro than a recognition of the dangers of the streets of Caracas.

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THE FACTS  
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¶2. (U) Raquel de los Angeles Perez Ramirez, age 52, was murdered in the Campo Rico area of Petare, a notoriously poor and underdeveloped neighborhood just outside of Caracas. A 22-year-old man was arrested for stabbing Perez Ramirez in the back. The murder is believed to be a random incident of lethal street crime, an event that would have barely made the headlines had it not been for Chavez's singling it out. Perez Ramirez had been living in Venezuela for approximately three years, participating in the Barrio Adentro Mission, a BRV initiative to offer health care (with predominantly Cuban providers) to residents of poor neighborhoods such as Petare.

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CHAVEZ UP IN ARMS  
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¶3. (U) During President Chavez's September 3 transmission of "Alo, Presidente," he dedicated considerable time to lamenting the murder of Perez Ramirez and impugning municipal police authorities' efforts to combat such street crime. Chavez emotionally called on all Venezuelans to work harder to protect the precious lives of these "Cuban brothers." He appealed to "all the people, all communities, all mayors, all governors, all political parties, social leaders, and

National Guard commanders" to prevent such atrocities. In an impromptu eulogy to the slain doctor, Chavez emphasized how much it pained him to be saddled with the responsibility of returning to Cuba nothing more than a corpse. Chavez did not mention any of the at least nineteen Venezuelans who were murdered in Caracas over the same weekend.

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NOT THE FIRST TIME  
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14. (U) A September 5 story regarding the Perez Ramirez homicide ran a list of seven other Cuban doctors killed or raped in Venezuela. Five doctors, ranging in age from 32 to 40 and having participated in Barrio Adentro from six months to three years, have been murdered in Venezuela. The violence has not been restricted to Caracas, with some murders having occurred in the states of Sucre, Zulia, and Anzoategui. In November 2005, two Cuban doctors were raped inside a Barrio Adentro facility in Zulia by six attackers. In response to that incident, Chavez personally requested forgiveness from Fidel Castro.

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COMMENT  
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15. (SBU) Given the butcher's bill of Venezuelans murdered in his country, Chavez's public and emotional reaction to this murder sets it apart from others. Polls indicate the growing crime rate is a, if not the, major concern of Venezuelans in all social sectors. The government seems increasingly incapable of dealing with this problem. Chavez's apparent complete disregard for his compatriots' well-being and heartfelt sadness at the death of a Cuban doctor is striking. Whether Chavez is just oblivious to the crime that plagues his own people or values Cuban blood more

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than Venezuelan, his astounding failure to recognize the crime afflicting his own people can't possibly be lost on Venezuelan voters.

WHITAKER